

The Fountain For Cleansing

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"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

"But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Mrs. Catherine Booth named her eldest son after William Bramwell, the holiness preacher of John Wesley's day. In so doing she dedicated him to be a preacher of full salvation. He realized his mother's desire, and when, as the Salvation Army's first Chief of Staff and then its second General, he had opportunities to proclaim the message of redemption, he told not only of the possibility of the sinner being forgiven of his sins, but declared with no uncertain sound that the blood of the Lord Jesus was still efficacious to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

A generation ago Bramwell Booth founded what was then known as the White-chapel Holiness Meetings. He often used a hymn of Charles Wesley's, beginning "Called from above, I rise to wash away my sins." It was a firm favorite in those days.

*"My thirsty spirit craves
No lesser joy than this,
To know that Jesus fully saves
And I am fully His."*

An earlier verse of that hymn tells of a fountain deep and wide, that flows "divinely clear," and that was opened in the Saviour's side by the soldier's spear. John says that after the crucifixion, Roman soldiers were sent to break the bones of the crucified on that occasion, to expedite their death, but "When they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:33, 34). With those words in mind one gifted song writer told of "rivers of love and mercy."

Zechariah, Hebrew prophet of those post-exilic days, saw a fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). He saw the fountain flowing with a twofold remedy; a twofold cure to meet a twofold need, for sin, let it always be remembered, is a twofold problem.

An understanding of the real nature of sin is vital, for one's views of the atonement that God in grace has provided are dependent on, and determined by, our conception of that sin which necessitated the Saviour's great sacrifice. "Defective views of sin lead to incorrect views of privilege," wrote Thomas Cook. But however elaborate our definitions, however varied sin's manifestations, sin is in short a twofold problem, that of wrong being and wrong doing. It is a principle of corruption, a state of the heart itself, a corrupt center, the principle of wrong being that manifests itself in daily and outward life as acts of wrong doing.

One determines the other, for the fruit, be it the fruit of a tree or the fruit of a life, results from the inner conditions of the roots. In Mark's gospel, chapter seven, the Lord Jesus himself said that the things which defile a man are those that proceed forth from the heart, in effect, because they are there already.

"Man is not a sinner because he sins," said one old teacher, "he sins because he is a sinner already."

And just there you have a vivid illustration of the twofold nature of sin. We speak of sin as being inbred and actual. In his epic poem, the "Everlasting Mercy," John Mansfield puts this confession on the lips of his chief character, Mr. Saul Kane, "The sin I did by being me." His grammar may have been defective, but his logic was perfect. Sin is simply being myself. Oswald Chambers defined it as "my right to myself."

Sin determines the remedy that grace provides. Sin, a double problem, is met with grace, a double cure. The hymnwriter, A. M. Toplady, had this in mind, in his immortal "Rock of Ages", and in Cotterills version of the hymn we have these words:

*"Be of sin the double cure,—
Save from wrath and make me pure."*

Let me illustrate this double cure. My little daughter is three and a half years old. She wore a new frock the other day, a gift from her grandmother. Her mother told her to keep it clean. But like so many other little girls, Frances Jennifer did not do so. She tumbled over, and made it dirty. Her mamma reproved her, naturally, and then forgave her. But her mother could not forgive the dirty frock. That had to be washed, and made clean. So in the spiritual realm, for on the condition of our repentance and faith, God grants forgiveness to the sinner. But even God cannot forgive the sinful heart, that has to be cleansed, and so purified.

Many of our gospel hymns speak of cleansing from sin. What wonderful songs they are! But such cleansing from sin is only a judicial one, or a freeing from the guilt of actual sinning, and so is synonymous with the Spirit's work in justification and regeneration. Isaiah speaks of such a cleansing grace, with the promise that we are made as white as snow (Isa. 1:18). In his classic, "Perfect Love," J. A. Wood points out that if you examined a flake of snow under a microscope, you would discover little pieces of dirt that the snow flake had "picked up" on its fall through the atmosphere. In the heart of every regenerate believer there remains that "infection of nature." A further work of grace is needed, whereby the heart already as white as snow is now made whiter than snow, in keeping with David's prayer in Psalm 51.

David, of course, knew all about that, even if he was no scientist. He failed lamentably over the matter of Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite. But he did realize his folly, and had the manliness to confess his sin, as sin. Others in his position would have excused it. Not so David. He was "out with it." In that fifty-first Psalm, he prayed that God would have mercy upon him, and "blot out" his transgressions. It was pardon that he sought. It was pardon that he received, for, as the Bible teaches, as far as the east is removed from the west, thus far will He remove our transgressions from us. David says that right back of the sin he had committed lay that inner evil nature. He prayed that the Lord would deal with that as well. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Read through that fifty-first Psalm. Now open your hymn book to that hymn begin-

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It Takes Zeal

Some years ago a church began to experience a mighty work of God. Ministers of other denominations were stirred by this work and upon inquiry as to how it started were told the following story:

"Ours was a church that did not have a summer slump. Ours was a year-around slump. How we worked for that church! But despite all our efforts the services continued to dwindle Sunday after Sunday until it seemed we would have to close.

"We blamed the minister. He was a godly man and would have given his life for the Gospel. We blamed the young people. Some almost blamed God Himself.

Prayer Avails When All Else Fails

"About this time a quiet, middle-aged woman moved into town. Her faith was boundless. She knew the Bible from cover to cover. Her quiet and trusting manner in quoting God's promises put us to shame. The sight of our unfilled pews, our almost empty Sunday school, left her dismayed. 'God wants His house filled,' she said. 'He wants the young people saved and the older ones reclaimed. He wants men and women delivered from Satan's power. We must take ourselves to prayer for them.'

"Encouraged by her insistent, unfaltering faith, we set ourselves to praying. We began, a little band of eight earnest souls. Every day at eleven and again at four, we gave ourselves to prayer for the ministry, for the ingathering of souls in the community, for our loved ones, for those in authority in our nation, for all men, and for the mission fields. As God laid it on our hearts, so we prayed.

Make Prayer the Business of Our Lives

"Every evening for one hour before services we prayed, unitedly, earnestly. All talking was forbidden. We tiptoed to our place of prayer and stayed there as long as our hearts were burdened. Prayer became our business. We gave ourselves to it and all that was in us! And how God did help us! We did not proclaim what we were doing abroad, but others, attracted by our earnestness, began to join us in prayer.

"Soon the attendance in church and Sunday school began to increase. By God's help, we built an altar of prayer in our church, and built all other things around it. We held with an iron grasp the hours we had pledged to prayer. The leadership of the Holy Spirit was acknowledged. Human leadership and self-assertion were not encouraged in our midst. All self was humbled. Our spirits were contrite and broken under the burden of prayer for lost souls.

"Our minister caught the fire. Our church became holy ground. Before the town realized it, the church services were crowded. The picture houses and dance halls were almost deserted and the spirit of a Heaven-born revival pervaded the whole town and countryside."—"Herald of His Coming."

Dr. Henry Ward Beecher was once asked "What do you do when people in your church go to sleep?"

Without a moment's hesitation he gravely answered, "I have left strict orders with the sexton that if he sees anyone going to sleep he shall come at once to the pulpit and wake up the minister."